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LETTER DATED 2 MARCH 2000 FROM THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

With reference to your letter dated 1 March 2000 (S/2000/167), I should like to inform you that in a letter dated 1 March 2000 addressed to the Permanent Representative of Iraq to the United Nations, Saeed Hasan, the Executive Director of the Office of the Iraq Programme informed him of the Security Council's decision to authorize the Secretary-General to proceed with the necessary arrangements regarding the Hajj pilgrimage outlined in the statement of implementation as proposed by the Secretary-General (S/2000/166, annex).

In a letter dated 2 March 2000 to the Executive Director of the Office of the Iraq Programme, the Permanent Representative of Iraq stated, inter alia, that the response to the request made by the Government of Iraq had come "after a considerable delay and there [was] no longer any time to study any proposal". Copies of the correspondence between the Executive Director of the Office of the Iraq Programme and the Permanent Representative of Iraq are provided for your information (see annexes I and II).

(Signed) Kofi A. ANNAN

Annex I

[Original: English]

Letter dated 1 March 2000 from the Executive Director of the Office of the Iraq Programme addressed to the Permanent Representative of Iraq to the United Nations

I have the honour to refer to paragraph 26 of Security Council resolution 1284 (1999), in which the Council requested the Secretary-General to make the necessary arrangements, for approval by the Council, to provide for reasonable expenses related to the Hajj pilgrimage to be met by funds in the escrow account established by its resolution 986 (1995). The Council also decided that Hajj pilgrimage flights which do not transport cargo into or out of Iraq are exempt from the provisions of paragraph 3 of Council resolution 661 (1990) and Council resolution 670 (1990), provided timely notification of each flight is made to the Security Council Committee established by resolution 661 (1990).

In his letter dated 24 February 2000 to the President of the Security Council (S/2000/166), the Secretary-General, pursuant to paragraph 26 of Council resolution 1284 (1999), and taking into full account the provisions of relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolutions 661 (1990), 670 (1990) and 986 (1995), submitted for the consideration of the Council the arrangements to provide for reasonable expenses related to the Hajj pilgrimage to be met by funds in the escrow account established by Council resolution 986 (1995). The proposed arrangements were discussed by the Council at its informal consultations held on 28 and 29 February 2000.

In a letter dated 1 March 2000 to the Secretary-General (S/2000/167), the President of the Security Council informed the Secretary-General of the Council's decision to authorize him to proceed with the necessary arrangements regarding the Hajj pilgrimage outlined in the statement of implementation as proposed by the Secretary-General (S/2000/166, annex). As authorized by the Council, the total amount of $2,000 per pilgrim, as identified by the Government of Iraq, will be distributed at the headquarters of the United Nations Office of the Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq (UNOHCI) in Baghdad. Of this amount, $250 in cash and $1,750 in traveller's cheques will be distributed to each pilgrim. The distribution will be undertaken in the presence of UNOHCI personnel and representatives of the Government of Iraq.

Recognizing the important religious duty of Iraqi Muslims to perform the Hajj pilgrimage and noting the urgent time-frame involved, I should kindly like to request the cooperation of the Government of Iraq in facilitating the necessary arrangements. In this regard, I should like to request that the list of the names of the Iraqi pilgrims be submitted to the United Nations, as indicated in the letter of the Secretary-General dated 24 February 2000, and would be grateful for the urgent delivery of this list to UNOHCI headquarters in Baghdad by Saturday, 4 March 2000.

The total funds will be transferred to an established bank in Amman, Jordan, where they will be issued appropriately and escorted by United Nations

security personnel to a United Nations chartered aircraft. In this regard, I should like to draw your attention to the need for flight clearance by the Government of Iraq for a United Nations chartered plane to transport the funds from Jordan, and the need for security personnel designated by the Government to assist United Nations security personnel in ensuring the safety of the funds at UNOHCI headquarters in Baghdad. The Government should also designate representatives to be present during the distribution of funds to Iraqi pilgrims at UNOHCI headquarters in Baghdad.

In light of the urgency of the matter, I should appreciate receiving the response of your Government to the arrangements proposed above at your earliest possible convenience, but no later than close of business, Thursday, 2 March 2000.

(Signed) Benon V. SEVAN
Executive Director

Annex II

[Original: Arabic]

Letter dated 2 March 2000 from the Permanent Representative of Iraq to the United Nations addressed to the Executive Director of the Office of the Iraq Programme

I have today received your letter dated 1 March 2000 containing your proposal concerning the Hajj pilgrimage. I should like to inform you of our position, as follows:

1. It is deplorable that the members of the Security Council have been discussing the question of the pilgrimage by Iraqi Muslims to the Holy City of God for four months now. Since the beginning, we have asked, as is made clear in our letters over the last three years, that payments for Iraqi pilgrims should come out of Iraqi finances, and be made through their national Government and financial institutions and not by any other means or from any other quarter. The money in question is Iraqi money, not a gift from the Security Council or the United States of America. From the beginning, Iraq put forward a proposal that guarantees the safe distribution of Iraqi money to Iraqi pilgrims, as confirmed in our most recent letter dated 2 February 2000 addressed to the Chairman of the 661 Committee. However, the United States of America and the United Kingdom have persistently blocked this proposal for political reasons. It is regrettable that the issue of the pilgrimage, which is a religious and humanitarian matter affecting millions of Muslims, has been turned into a bargaining chip and a means by which the United States of America seeks to apply political pressure. The United States of America, in its ignorance, believes that it can mask its real intentions towards the Iraqi people. Everyone knows that the United States of America and its British ally are the ones who are insisting on the maintenance of the comprehensive and inhumane sanctions against us, using the illegal aerial exclusion zones to attack our villages and towns on a daily basis, and perpetrating all kinds of hostile acts in contravention of the Charter of the United Nations and international law.

2. Without going into details about the proposal which you mentioned in your letter dated 1 March 2000 concerning the request that we have been making for three years to the United Nations, and as reiterated in our recent letter dated 2 February 2000 addressed to the Chairman of the 661 Committee, while recognizing the efforts made by the French and Russian representatives to introduce improvements to the proposal of the Secretary-General of 24 February 2000, I regret to inform you that your response to our letter came after a considerable delay and there is no longer any time to study any proposal. The pilgrimage season has in fact already begun and the few Iraqi pilgrims with the material means to be able to perform this religious duty have

already, with God's blessing, arrived at the Holy Place or are on their way thereto. Saudi Arabia will close its frontiers to pilgrims in the next few days.

(Signed) Saeed H. HASAN
Ambassador
Permanent Representative